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SUBJECT: FINLAND: STUBB PRESSES HARD FOR NATO
MEMBERSHIP

¶1. At a well-attended NATO 60th anniversary event on April 2 in Helsinki, Foreign Minister Stubb spoke forcefully about the benefits of NATO membership. Stubb stressed that he supported the Government of Finland's (GOF) policy articulated in the recent defense white paper, according to which while there are "strong grounds" in favor of Finland's NATO membership, currently there is insufficient public and political support. He said that the GOF policy requires evaluating NATO's development, which should be done in open debate, not behind closed doors. Stubb offered ten "NATO facts" as part of that debate, many of which seek to allay common concerns of NATO skeptics:

- NATO brings military benefit to the Member States.
- NATO's security guarantees are real.
- NATO is not a "remote terminal" for the U.S. military through which unsuspecting allies are dragged to wars on distant battlefields.
- NATO is an organization where civilians make the decisions.
- NATO membership will not increase countries' risk of terrorism.
- NATO membership does not overrule national autonomy.
- NATO does not force anyone to give up conscription.
- Nobody ends up in NATO, you apply to it.
- NATO membership would not change Finland's Russia policy.
- Yes, NATO membership carries costs but benefits accrue to Finland's security.

¶2. Stubb asserted that Finland's policies toward Russia would not change due to NATO membership, nor would Russia's toward Finland. He pointed to good Finnish-Russian relations following Finland's 1995 entry into the EU. Another participant disputed Stubb's assertion, arguing that Russia would change its policy; the participant added that Moscow does not send NATO-related messages without purpose, perhaps making a reference to a Finnish Broadcasting Company (YLE) interview March 28 with Yuli Kvitsinsky, deputy chair of the Duma's foreign affairs committee, in which Kvitsinsky said that Russia would mount a range of military, political and economic "countermeasures" if Finland joined NATO. [Note: GoF announced April 8 that Russian President Medvedev visits Finland April 20-21.]

¶3. Approximately 500 people attended the event, organized by the Atlantic Council of Finland, including parliamentarians and high-level government officials. YLE ("the BBC of Finland") covered the event on its website; the newspaper Demari and a few smaller magazines also attended. While the event included more NATO supporters than skeptics or opponents, lively discussion addressed both views. In particular, the question of Russia's possible response engendered considerable debate.

¶4. COMMENT. Last August Stubb spoke favorably about NATO in a public speech, causing a stir that forced him to reassure parliamentarians that his words did not signal a change in the government's policy to maintain the "option" to join NATO. Last week Stubb spoke even more emphatically in favor of NATO, but he clearly learned a lesson, as he shrewdly based his vocal contribution to an open debate on the GOF's policy (and voiced explicit support for the existing policy). Some Finns have complained to Embassy officers that the "NATO debate" in Finland is based more on emotion and outdated attitudes than fact. Though modestly covered by the media, this event, and in particular Stubb's contribution, helped foster a fact-based debate (an MSP goal). We are coordinating with other NATO Member State embassies, the MFA, think tanks and the Atlantic Council on other events during this anniversary year that will contribute to that debate. END COMMENT.

BUTLER